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THE CALL TO THE SACRED MINISTRY.

A

DISCOURSE

ADDRESSED TO MEMBERS OF

THE

CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

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BY A CLERGYMAN.

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THE CALL

TO

The Sacred Ministry.

Beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits, whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.—1 JOHN, vi. 1.

It has never been the plan of Almighty God to make his truth so clear, that man could not deceive himself. On the contrary, there has been scarcely any age in which such difficulties did not beset the truth, that ignorant and unstable minds might without difficulty be led astray. No doubt we may desire that it should be otherwise: but it is not so. Error is allowed to prevail, as well as truth, for a trial to us which we will choose; "that they who are approved may be made manifest." Under the law of Moses it pleased God to suffer men who upheld the worship of false gods to give signs in support of their pretensions, which signs came to pass, (Deut. xiii. 1—3) although in opposition to God's truth and honour. We may easily imagine that many would be grievously perplexed, when they saw that the prophets of Baal could give signs, and that their signs came to pass as well as those given by the prophets of God. We may imagine that many would say, How can we know which is right and which is wrong? But still God thought fit to allow it, for a trial to show who were his sincere worshippers, and who not. For the sincere-hearted worshippers never were misled: they found the worship of God to be the salvation of their souls, and they could not be tempted to depart from him.

So again in the New Testament we read of Satan appearing "as an angel of light," and his ministers appearing "as the ministers of righteousness." This language is well worthy of our attention: for what can it signify, excepting that it shall many times be extremely difficult to distinguish the preachers of truth, ordained and sent by God's authority, from the preachers of error, thrust in by Satan to spread delusion amongst Christians?

And so it has been. Many false prophets came out into the world even in the Apostles' times, and deceived many: for they so much resembled Christ's apostles that many could see no sufficient reason to listen to one more than to another. But still sincere minds in the Church could and did "try the spirits, whether they were of God"; for they had an inward "anointing of God," and could not be deceived. They were commanded so to do, and they did so; and thus those who were approved were made manifest,—not to the eye of every professed Christian, but to the holy angels, and to those who were themselves approved. But the ignorant and unstable were no doubt in great perplexity which to choose. And the same thing is going on now. There are and must be God's true messengers, and there are likewise teachers, falsely professing themselves his messengers; and it is difficult to decide between them. That this is the case will appear if we consider that there are in this country, as in others, many different bodies of Christian teachers, gathering followers around them, all professing to come with authority from God; and yet that they cannot all be from God, because they gather together followers in opposition to each other. Notwithstanding this, they all appear as ministers of righteousness. They all take the same main truths to build upon; they all profess to desire to reclaim men from sin, and bring them to everlasting blessedness; they all appear more or less to succeed in so doing. And yet their doctrines are contradictory one to another, and they do

not unite together in Christian communion; they are not bound together into one society. Some of them, therefore, cannot be from God. And as the Word of God reveals but one Church, one faith, one baptism, one fellowship, it is to be feared that all of these bodies of teachers excepting one, must be without divine authority: and it appears a just conclusion, that this one body must be Christ's *true* ministers, and no other: for "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace." It is therefore highly important to every Christian to know whom to follow, and whom not to follow; for truth is but one.

Moreover, there are certain passages in the New Testament concerning the Christian ministry, and the duties of private Christians towards those who are between God and them in matters of the soul; and it is very important to every one to know how to apply them aright. Christ, for instance, says that "it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment," than for those who will not receive the messengers whom he has sent. How important then to know whom he has sent!

There is another passage in which a very striking command is given, which the spirit of liberty of our day has caused to be almost totally neglected. St. Paul writes, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account." The words are simple and plain; but how entirely are they neglected! and most neglected by those who make the loudest professions of taking their religion entirely from the Word of God! But one great reason of the neglect is the multiplicity of those who profess to be ministers of Christ, watching for men's souls. Now no man can obey *all* these. No man can serve even two masters. If you obey one, you must disobey another. One informs me that I am bound to have my children baptized, another declares that they are not to be baptized. One requires me to receive the

traditions of the Church of Rome, another forbids me to acknowledge any authority in that Church. One teaches me that, if I feel a disposition to take upon me the functions of the Christian ministry, I must do it forthwith; another forbids me to do it without an authoritative commission through the instrumentality of men. One commands me to seek the assurance of divine forgiveness through direct impressions upon the soul,—another requires me to look for it in sacramental ordinances. One requires my obedience to his authority, because he bears a commission from the Bishop of Rome,—another, because he is commissioned by a bishop who has received his authority in a direct line from the apostles,—another, because he has been ordained by those whom the rules of his Church empower to ordain,—a fourth because he has received a direct commission from Christ. So that it is impossible to obey one without disobeying another; and if the one I disobey be indeed placed over me by Christ, in disobeying him I disobey his Master and my own Judge.

The question then is, how are we to know a true minister of the Gospel? whom are we to receive as such? whom must we obey for Christ's sake and our souls' sake?

In discussing this point I purpose, first, to consider the answers which are most commonly given to this question, and to show that they are erroneous,—and afterwards to point out a track by following which we may arrive at the right answer.

I. 1. One answer very commonly given is that the person who thinks he has an inward call, who feels within him a strong and vehement desire to proclaim the message of salvation, is a true minister of Christ. But this answer is not a sufficient one: first, because some of all the parties I have mentioned will profess that they have this call, and yet they contradict each other in their teaching: so that we are left just where we were before. But, further, what we observe in the Bible is in opposition

to this view. The Bible contains no warrant whatever for saying that when a person supposes he has an inward call, that *by itself* is a sufficient reason for his taking upon him the office of a Christian preacher. There is no instance, either in the Old Testament or in the New, of a person who was a *real* minister of God resting his claim to that high office *only* upon the foundation of an inward call. It is very remarkable, that the only persons mentioned in the Bible, who had *only* an inward call, are the false prophets. "I have not sent these prophets," saith the Lord, "yet they run: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." And again, "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say unto them that prophesy *out of their own hearts*, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord God, Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow *their own spirit*, and have seen nothing." These men, we see, were led by something within them: they *had* an inward call to prophesy; but the call did not come from God. And we are nowhere told of any true prophets whose claim to be heard rested only on an inward call.

To come to the times of the Gospel, with which we are more immediately concerned, we are so far from finding the apostles resting their authority upon an inward call, that we are nowhere informed that they had any such call to take upon them their office. Peter and his companions were engaged in their ordinary occupation, and Matthew was seated at the receipt of custom, when they received a call from Christ to follow him; but it was an *outward* call. Christ himself had an outward call by the ministry of John the Baptist, before he exercised his ministry. And so with regard to St. Paul, and any others of whom we read that they were called to the ministry of the gospel, where any mention is made of their being called, the call is outward. Indeed, some of the most remarkable and the most highly gifted, both under the law and under the gospel, followed an outward call in

opposition to their inward wishes and feelings. Moses received more than one call, and both outward, before he would go on his mission. And St. Paul was absolutely engaged in persecuting Christ's followers, when he received his call, and that an outward one. So that when persons plead an inward call as their authority for taking upon them the office of ministers of Christ, they go contrary to the whole current of Scripture; they follow the example of the false prophets of old; they teach for doctrines the traditions of men; they set aside the example of Christ and his apostles, to follow the imagination of their own hearts.

But it is sometimes asked, does not the Church teach this same doctrine, when the Bishop inquires of those who are candidates for holy orders, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost, to take upon you this office and ministration, to serve God for the promoting of his glory and the edifying of his people?" Does not this question imply that every one should have an inward call before he takes upon him the office of a minister of Christ? To this question as they intend it, I reply, No. For what is signified by being inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost? Does not every godly desire and motive come from the Holy Ghost? What the Church intends is this,—Do you desire to take the office of a minister of Christ from godly motives? for such reasons as you sincerely think came from the Holy Ghost? In short, are your motives worldly, or are they religious? Is it your chief desire in seeking the sacred ministry to earn a livelihood, or to be placed in an honourable station? or do you chiefly desire to serve God better yourself, and to be instrumental in his hands in bringing others to serve him better likewise? This is the meaning of the question, as it is addressed by the Bishop to the candidates for holy orders. He does not ask them whether they have a strong impression on their minds that they are called to that office: for that is a thing in

which they might easily be deceived; in the other they cannot,—if they are sincere.

But supposing the Church had meant the same thing as these persons, by the expression of being inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost,—still this circumstance would give no countenance to the idea that an inward call is sufficient to authorize a person as a minister of Christ. For the question is never asked respecting the inward feelings, until the person so questioned has had an outward call, and has been examined as to his outward qualifications. For no person is ever admitted even to an examination, who is not either called to minister in some parish,—or required to be ready for some sphere which is expected to be open for him,—or appointed to some office which requires that the person who holds it should be in holy orders, or which gives him a special opportunity of exercising the sacred ministry. The Canons of the Church do not permit him to be a candidate for Holy Orders, without some such outward call. So that an outward call is the first thing required by the Church, without which no idea of an inward call would ever be listened to. A person is not even permitted to be a candidate for the office of the ministry at his own desire, unless he can look forward to some place in the Church which gives him an outward call.

The Church therefore does not afford any countenance in her ordination services to the idea that an inward call, either real or supposed, is a sufficient authority to any person to take upon himself the office of a Christian minister.

2. Another common reason which some persons give for thinking a person a true minister of Christ is, that he is personally qualified for the office. They say that "whom God sends, he qualifies"; by which they mean, that if a person is ready in preaching and prayer,—if he is earnest in his manner, and if his delivery is good;—if in short he is qualified for a popular speaker, and can

carry with him the feelings of his audience, he must be a true minister of Christ: and with the multitude this opinion is very prevalent.

And yet there is scarcely a single notion which is more thoroughly in opposition to the Scriptures: for two of the greatest of God's ministers, the one under the Old Testament, the other under the New, were entirely destitute of these popular qualifications. Both Moses and St. Paul were just the reverse of eloquent. Moses, we read, knowing the vulgar error, urged his slowness of speech, as a reason why God should not send him. "O my Lord," said he, "I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, neither since thou hast spoken to thy servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." And God never did make him eloquent. And so of St. Paul: for some of the Corinthians, misled by the same error, questioned whether he was an apostle, because he was not eloquent. "His letters," said they, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." And he calls himself "rude in speech." Since, therefore, these two of the greatest and most honoured of God's ministers were entirely destitute of fluency of speech, it is plainly contrary to the Word of God to lay any stress upon this quality, and a most lamentable error to suppose that it is any mark at all of a Christian minister. Readiness of speech and powers of persuasion are gifts of God to some persons; either bestowed by nature, or acquired by habit and practice: and they were possessed in a very high degree indeed by many of the ancient heathen. If men have them, God may make use of them, as he did in the case of Apollos,—but they are by no means necessary. St. Paul was a divine instrument for the conversion and edification of thousands, and he was destitute of them.

3. And this brings me to a third thing, which many persons consider a sufficient evidence that a person is a minister of Christ, viz. that he is successful in the con-

version of sinners. For they conclude that none could convert sinners without the blessing of God on his labours; and they judge that God would not bless the labours of any, except those whom he has sent. Now it is very true that no person could convert sinners without the blessing of God on his labours; but it is not true that God blesses the labours of none except those whom he sends: and this we can prove beyond a doubt from the Word of God.

St. Paul, writing to the Philippians, has these words: "And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love. What then? notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea and will rejoice." We see here that St. Paul declares that he does rejoice and will rejoice that Christ is preached every way, whether in pretence or in truth. Now could St. Paul have rejoiced that Christ was preached, if there had been no good fruit of this preaching? Undoubtedly not. If no good were done, there could be no occasion for joy. What he rejoiced at no doubt was, that by this preaching sinners were converted to God. And could sinners have been converted without the blessing of God upoa the word preached? Undoubtedly not. But St. Paul informs us that some of these preachers preached Christ "in pretence," "of envy and strife," "of contention, not sincerely," thinking to occasion him more affliction, in addition to his imprisonment. Now is it possible to believe of these men, who began to preach out of envy and strife and contention, in order to vex the apostle, and without any authority from him,—is it possible to believe that God called them to their work? No one in his senses can possibly believe

it. And yet we find that when these bad men did preach, God gave his blessing with their preaching, to the conversion of the unbelievers to the knowledge and faith of Christ. Clearly then it is no proof that a person is called of God, when we find that his preaching avails to the conversion of sinners. God works with any means he chooses, and without means likewise; in order that we may learn that, although he has bound us to means, the blessing does not rest in them, but in Him who has appointed them.

4. There is still another answer which professes to settle the point in a much shorter manner. It is this: every man who preaches Christ is to be regarded as a minister of Christ. Now it is clear that this cannot be the case by what I have been just saying: for the persons whom St. Paul mentions did preach Christ, and yet they could not have been called by God, because they did it simply out of envy and opposition.

5. But then the current notion takes another form. Persons are apt to say, Supposing they are not properly sent by Christ, yet we may attend and profit by their preaching, because there is a blessing attending it. But let us consider the matter a little. St. Paul rejoiced that good was done in the conversion of *unbelievers*, by the preaching of men who preached out of strife and opposition: would he therefore have encouraged *Christians* to attend their ministry, and to countenance their ungodly conduct by their presence? On the contrary, he says to Christians, "Mark them that cause divisions and offences amongst you, and avoid them." So that whilst he is glad that some good does arise from their preaching, he would yet persuade and command *Christians* to avoid them. He was glad that men were brought from sin and unbelief by their preaching; but when they were so brought, and received into the fellowship of the Church, he required them to keep company with such persons no more. And so no doubt in the present day,

when so many sects and parties abound, although we may rejoice that sinners are awakened and convinced by the preaching of any,—yet we must not therefore conclude hastily that it is advisable to seek to any of them at discretion for our soul's benefit. The preaching of all may benefit to some extent; but if we follow the *whole* teaching of any who do not preach the truth as it is in Jesus, and look to be trained up by them in the whole life of God, we may be led into errors more dangerous than open sin; because they may ruin our souls without our perceiving it, or knowing how to guard against it.

6. But still there are persons who come back to the same point, and build upon words of our Lord himself. Upon a certain occasion the apostles reported to Christ that they had found a man casting out devils in his name, and that they forbid him, because he followed not with them: upon which he replied, "Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us." Hence they conclude that every man who chooses to take upon him to preach Christ is to be followed, and that we do wrong in dissuading persons from so doing.

Now in the first place, this passage is very little to the purpose; for the preachers of the present day do not cast out devils. If they did, it would be presumption to forbid them; for it is an act which none can perform, without the special authority and power of God.

But perhaps it is said that by the same rule, if we find men by their preaching casting out drunkenness, lewdness, Sabbath-breaking, swearing and the like, we are surely not to discourage them, but rather to encourage and commend them. And so, I fully grant, we ought to do. Whenever I see a man earnest and zealous against sin, checking it and repressing it in his own family, in his children, in his servants, amongst his friends and neighbours, I feel it my duty to encourage and commend him. Nay, more than this, if I should find that *after*

this man has thus done his duty at home, he finds time, without neglecting any domestic duty, to travel abroad and warn sinners to flee from sin wherever he can get a hearing, I will obey Christ's words; I will not forbid him.

But let me explain what I mean more fully. If I find that this man when at home is a sound member of the Church of Christ,—if I find that he attends the service of God in the Church constantly whenever opportunity offers,—that he is regularly seen at the Lord's Table,—that he obeys those who have the rule over him in the matters of his soul,—that he marks those who make divisions and avoids them,—but being moved by great zeal and great love, after duly attending the ministry of his own pastor (if he has one), and discharging every relative duty to which his station calls him, as a son, a brother, a husband, a master, a servant, he exhorts and warns sinners of their wickedness and danger,—I say again, I will not forbid him. I say with our Lord, "He that is not against us is on our side."

But that case would be a very different one from those of which I have been speaking. The persons who come about in the character of ministers of Christ, on the ground that every one may preach Christ and warn sinners, and whom we are blamed for discountenancing, are not men of this stamp. The larger portion must neglect the public worship of the Church, because there can be but one true Church, and they belong to various bodies: for the same reason many of them necessarily neglect the Communion of saints in that Church: most of them refuse to acknowledge any who shall rule over them in matters of salvation, and make and uphold divisions in the Church. And are these the persons whom we are not to forbid? Are these the persons who are not against us but for us? We do not forbid them to convert sinners; but we tell them first to perform their own duty as private Christians, and to abstain from dividing the body of Christ; and if they

would do so, we should generally find that they had employment enough nearer home. Whilst they are zealous to keep the vineyards of others, it is to be feared that they too often neglect their own.

To go back to the case of the man in the Gospel, of whom Jesus said, "Forbid him not;"—can we suppose that if this man had been found calling himself an apostle, declaring that he was fully as much so as the twelve, collecting together a sect in communion with himself, and in separation from the apostles,—do you think that in such a case our Lord would have said, "He that is not against us is for us"? No; for such persons Christ has taught a very different doctrine: for such persons our Lord has reserved a very different judgment. In regard to such persons his language is, "He that is not with us is against us; and he that gathereth not with us scattereth."

II. Seeing then that all these various current notions, as to what makes a person a true minister of Christ, are totally unfounded in the Word of God, and indeed directly contrary to it,—let us inquire what does qualify a person to be listened to in the name of Christ, and to be obeyed in the matters of the soul: and it will be found that both the Holy Bible itself and history, give at least one decisive mark, that he must have had his authority, openly and in the sight of others from our Lord himself, or from those who act by his authority.

1. I said both the Bible and history, but for the most part I shall confine myself to Scripture. The Apostle St. Paul, quoting from the Old Testament, says in one place, "How shall they preach except they be sent?" Clearly implying that "no one taketh this honour upon himself," but that every one must be sent. And if so, *as the message he has to deliver is from Christ, so the authority to preach must come from Christ.* And that all parties may be under no mistake, *it is requisite that this sending should take place in such a manner as that others*

should be witnesses of it. And so it was. The twelve Apostles and St. Paul, as we very well know, had their authority, outwardly and with the knowledge of others, from Christ himself. The next preachers we find in the New Testament were Philip and Stephen, two of the seven deacons. And how were they commissioned? They were ordained openly, and in the sight of others, by the Apostles themselves. After the Gospel was spread into various nations and countries, how did the first Christians obtain their ministers? The Apostles went through the countries they had preached in, and ordained elders in every city. And what was the nature of this ordination? They prayed and fasted, and laid their hands upon them in the presence of many witnesses.

But it was sometimes necessary that ministers should be appointed in places which the apostles could not visit, and how was this accomplished? It was not left to the people to choose and appoint their teachers; neither were persons left and allowed to take the office upon them of their own accord: but the Apostles chose out persons, and appointed them for that special office of ordaining others to teach and guide Christ's people. Sometimes this was done where there were hitherto no ministers, as when Titus was sent to Crete; but sometimes it was foreseen that additional ministers would be wanted at some future day, where there was one or more already. And was that left to the ministers already there? Were they permitted to choose whom they would, and appoint him to the same office they themselves held? No: a person was especially sent or left behind by an apostle, like Timothy at Ephesus, to ordain elders and deacons when they should be required.

But how was the appointment of ministers to be kept up after the death of the apostles? This must be answered from history. *We learn what they appointed by that which we find prevailing after their death for many hundreds of years, in all parts of the Church, and by the*

testimony of early Christian writers as to the origin of that state of things. From these sources we learn that before the apostles quitted this world they appointed persons every where, whose special office and business it should be to ordain the teachers of Christ's people; that they alone had the power of giving others that authority they themselves possessed; and that none were lawfully sent, except they were sent by persons having that authority.

Now here is a mark of the true teachers which admits of no mistake. It is not an inward thing, which none can know or judge of but the person possessing it. It does not require us to wait, to observe whether the preacher is successful, before we acknowledge him. It does not leave all at liberty to be teachers, to the endless confusion of the Church. According to the Word of God, no one has a right to be a public teacher in the Church of Christ, unless he is ordained to the office by one who has authority to ordain. And the practice of the apostles shows that none has authority to ordain but one who has received that authority down in a line from Christ and the apostles.

And what persons then in this country does this mark correspond with? Is there any Churchman that can have any doubt as to at least one body of teachers? Are there any members of our Church who doubt whether our Bishops have received authority to ordain, in a direct line from the apostles? Are there any persons who doubt whether our Clergy have received a commission to teach from the Bishops of the Church?

2. I have given one test, viz. a positive one: but as it may happen, and indeed has happened in various ages, that those who have received a real appointment from the apostles are yet not true pastors of the Church, I must introduce likewise a negative test; and that shall be furnished likewise from Holy Scripture.

St. Paul has these words, "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him

be accursed"; and St. John still more explicitly, "Who-soever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." It appears clear, then, that even if a person should have received the apostolical commission by ordination from a bishop deriving his authority from the apostles,—still, if he teaches doctrine the reverse of the doctrine of the apostles,—*if the thing is clear and evident*, he cannot be God's teacher to us: and therefore if two classes of teachers come before us, both having the apostolical commission, yet if one should teach the doctrine of Christ and the other not, this must be the great turning point to decide our choice. And how shall we decide this point except by minds trained to know the mind of Christ through the diligent study of the Scriptures, and, if doubt arise as to their meaning, by an appeal to the teaching of the Church Catholic, in those ages when in all parts of the Christian world that teaching was uniform, steadfast, and consistent?

And here again I ask, has any one amongst us a doubt that the Clergy of our Church will abide this test, whatever others may be disqualified by it;—that our teaching is agreeable both to the Word of God, and, so far as we know it, to the teaching of the primitive Catholic Church?

It is true that these facts will not appear equally clear to all minds,—that all have not equal means of ascertaining them,—that some must take them upon trust from others,—that something is left for private judgment, and therefore some room for error. But this is only what happens to us in the ordinary business of life, and it is another illustration of what I remarked in the commencement, that God never intended to make truth so clear that man could not deceive himself. No: the search and acquisition of truth are with multitudes the trial of their characters,—the appointed trial; and many

miss the attainment of it, because they have allowed their consciences to become so blinded by wilful or careless transgression, that they cannot perceive it. But it is vain for us to think of shrinking from personal responsibility in that respect, more than in any other. One person may endeavour to escape it by professing to be guided by the Spirit, and another by being guided by a Church professing infallibility: but in the eye of God it still remains. Nor to him who bears it as before God, and in *every* thing follows sincerely the light he gives, will the truth ever be sought in vain.

Here then, Christian brethren, are teachers in whom you may rely,—those concerning whom you feel assured that they have a divine outward commission to exercise their office,—and who teach to you the doctrine of Christ as it was delivered to his Church by his holy Apostles. Your best informed conscience cannot resist their claim. Their teaching is by divine authority. He that despiseth them despiseth him that sent them. Whilst the true Christian finds himself in their ministry privileged to be brought into nearer and nearer communion with our living Head, until he is removed to join the blessed company of the just made perfect.

